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## BRETHERHED IN CHAUCER'S PROLOG

It is of more interest to know what Chaucer's Parson did than what he didn't do, but what he didn't do throws as much light on him and his fellow-priests. He attended to his cure and did not run

to London, un-to seynte<sup>1</sup> Poules,  
To seken him a chaunterie for soules,  
Or with a bretherhed to ben withholde;  
But dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde (*Prolog*. 509-12).

Most of this has been sufficiently explained by the commentators, but *bretherhed* only inaccurately or vaguely,—either as a religious

<sup>1</sup>I reject Skeat's impossible *seynt*, justified by neither historical grammar nor analogy; although among the published mss. only Cp. and Hl. 7334 have the -e, and we find *seint Poul(es)* in B 3970 and 4631. Two things are clear. The word *seynt(e)* in Chaucer in the large majority of cases is monosyllabic. Before the names of female saints it is usually or always dissyllabic, as in French. Cf. the following:

‘No,’ quod he, ‘by Seynte Clare’

(*H. F.* 1066; the mss. do not favor the -e, but the rithm ensures it);

‘I hadde the prente of seynte Venus seel’

(*W. B. P.* 604; the Wife of Bath shall have her way as to the sanctity of her patroness);

And seyde, ‘help us, seinte Frideswyde’ (*Mill. T.* 3449).

With *seynte Marie* the word seems always dissyllabic, though in one or two cases we might possibly have a 9-syllable line; cf. *H. F.* 573, *Sir Th.* 1974, *Phys.-Pard. Link* 308, *Pard. T.* 685, *Fri. T.* 1604, *Merch. T.* 1337, 1899, 2418. The word *charitee* is treated like the name of a female saint; *e. g. Sumn. T.* 2119 (also in *Kn. T.* 1721, *N. P. T.* 4510),

Now, Thomas, help for seinte charitee.

As to male saints, the matter is sometimes doubtful. The following may be 9-syllable lines, but the verse is better with a dissyllabic *seynte*: *Prolog*. 697 (Peter), *Mill. T.* 3771 (note); in the old carpenter's charm the verse is so rough that we cannot with certainty read “seynte Benedight,” but we probably should (*Mill. T.* 3483). The strongest cases for a pronounced -e are that under discussion and the following (*Prolog*. 120 and *Fri. T.* 1564, though in the last the mss. vary in wording):

Hir gretteste ooth was but by seynt(e) Loy;

I pray god save thee and seynt(e) Loy.

Between an unspeakable 9-syllable line, the unheard-of dieresis expedient, and the pronounced -e, it is not hard to choose the last. With a language

community,<sup>2</sup> or merely as a brotherhood (of one kind or another).<sup>3</sup> This latter gloss leaves the question just where it was before; as to the other, it is hard to imagine why a fourteenth century convent should undertake to maintain a penniless but able-bodied secular priest.

*Bretherhed* simply means *gild*, of one kind or another, being merely a translation of *fraternitas*; *fraternitee* is used in the same sense in l. 364. In gild-records, along with other words,—craft, occupation, mystery, gild, fraternity (the two commonest), brotherhood sometimes appears; as for example in a document of the gild of the bakers (1483) and that of the tailors (1503) in Exeter,<sup>4</sup> and in that of St. John Baptist, Oxburgh, Norfolk (founded 1307-8).<sup>5</sup> It is especially to the point that the word was far more used in London gilds than elsewhere, as in those of Garlekhith (1375), of St. Katherine (1388-9), of Sts. Fabian and Sebastian (1379-80),<sup>6</sup> of our Lady of Abchurch (1387).<sup>7</sup> Priests and chaplains<sup>8</sup> are repeatedly mentioned in gild-records. The gild of the Blessed Mary in Chesterfield (founded in 1218) had a chaplain, and so had that of the tailors in Lincoln (founded in 1328); that of Stratford-on-Avon

which has lost the feeling for gender, where the phrase-rhythm favors it there is nothing remarkable in the originally ungrammatical form appearing now and then in speech and in Chaucer's colloquial verse. The *-e* of *seynte* is better explained as the French feminine ending, sometimes extended to the masculine, than as a vocative *-e* (as by ten Brink, *Chaucers Sprache u. Verskunst*, 2nd ed., p. 130). Skeat's *seynte* for the feminine, and sometimes *seynt* and sometimes *sejnt* for the masculine, form an impossibility.

<sup>2</sup> By Morris, Skeat, and Liddell.

<sup>3</sup> By von Düring, Hertzberg, de Chatelain, Cazamian, Corson, Pollard, Mather, Bentinck Smith, Greenlaw, and MacCracken.

<sup>4</sup> Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds* (E. E. T. S., 1870), 327, 335 (here more in the abstract sense of brotherhood).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-11. These are the only London gilds whose records are printed by Toulmin Smith.

<sup>7</sup> *English Wills* (ed. Furnivall, E. E. T. S., 1882), p. 1. For many other cases of the word in London, cf. Rock, *Church of Our Fathers* (2nd edition), II, 324 ff.; cf. also pp. 335, 354.

<sup>8</sup> Originally meaning the priest of a chapel, the word usually meant a chantry-priest, whose main duty was to say private masses. In one or two of the cases cited the chaplain may not have been a permanent official of the gild.

had four in 1547, the Gild Merchant of Coventry in 1340 was to have as many as it could afford, the gild of Corpus Christi in Coventry was to have one (1381), that of the Holy Trinity in Coventry was to have two (1364), that of the Holy Cross in Birmingham was to have two (1392), that of the Holy Trinity in Cambridge was to have one if possible (1384), likewise that of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Cambridge (1385); the gild of tailors in Exeter had a priest (1479-80).<sup>9</sup>

Skeat did "not see how *with-holde* can mean 'maintained,' as it is usually explained"; he accordingly defines it as "be kept (*i. e.* remain) in retirement."<sup>10</sup> But it means neither. In the other passages in Chaucer where the word occurs there is no notion of retirement, or of being passively supported either. It generally means 'keep, hold, retain,'<sup>11</sup> occasionally 'restrain,'<sup>12</sup> or 'attach (to a certain party).'<sup>13</sup> In *Melibeus*, 2202, it means 'engage for a certain service,'<sup>14</sup> precisely the meaning here. We are to understand, then, that the Parson would have been retained or engaged to give all or most of his time to the good of the gild members. His labors would have been light, doubtless to say masses and other services for the living and the dead at the quarterly gild-meetings, but chiefly to say diriges, placebos and masses for members on their decease; and since a private mass can be said in some twenty min-

<sup>9</sup> *English Gilds*, pp. 168, 183, 223, 228 ff., 232, 234, 240 ff., 263, 271, 319, 324, 327; cf. pp. 146, 165. Chaplains are often mentioned in the records even of the rather secular gilds-merchant; cf. Gross, *The Gild Merchant*, I, 28, 34; II, 159, 163, 169, 174. There were six chaplains in a gild at Nantwich, and thirteen at Lynn in the time of Richard II. See also Rock, *Church of Our Fathers*, II, 276, 320 ff., 327, 329; Lugo Brentano, *Hist. and Devel. of Gilds*, pp. cxxxiii f. (in Toulmin Smith's *English Gilds*; separately printed also, London, n. d., pp. 69 ff.), and *Die Arbeitergilden der Gegenwart* (Leipzig, 1871), p. 55; George Unwin, *Gilds of London* (London, 1908), pp. 117, 203, 208, etc.; and Gross, *Bibliography of Municipal History* (N. Y., 1897), p. 442, for references on gilds in general.

<sup>10</sup> Agreeably to his idea of *bretherthed* as a religious community; *Oxford Chaucer*, v, 46.

<sup>11</sup> *Sec. N. T.* 345, *Pars. T.* 1041; *Boethius* II, pr. i. 87-9 (*Student's Chaucer*), iv, 135-7, iv, ii. 217, iii. 136, vi. 270, 397, 399, v, m. iii. 50-1. In the *Boethius* passages the original always has the verb *retinere* (or *detinere* or *retentare*).

<sup>12</sup> *Boethius* II, m. ii, 19.

<sup>13</sup> *L. G. W.*, Prol. F. 192.

<sup>14</sup> To us surgiens . . . wher-as we been with-holde.

utes, even the total of twenty-four, thirty or so bestowed on each soul would have left abundant leisure for other occupations, remunerative or of other character, such as the shady speculations of the annualler-priest in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, or for the study which would have appealed more to the Parson. In spite of the low pay,<sup>15</sup> the office would have had its attraction for one who rebelled against the hardships of pastoral life in a wide and scattered parish; and Chaucer's line shows that it sometimes did secure such men.<sup>16</sup>

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### "SEITH TROPHEE"

Professor Tupper's article on Chaucer's *Trophee* in the January number of the current volume of this journal has forestalled me in publishing a paper on the same subject, already in final form and submitted to two or three friends within the last two months. To Professor Tupper's article, with its new support of Mr. G. L. Hamilton's suggestion, may I add one or two notes?

Although Chaucer speaks of "Guido eek de Columpnis" in the *House of Fame*, 1469, he probably also knew that manuscripts of the *Historia Trojana* often gave the name with the singular cognomen. This may be seen, to go no further, from Ward's *Catalogue of Romances in the British Museum*. Of the two earliest there described, both written about 1350, the second gives the singular of the name—"de Columpna"—in the Prologue, altho the plural "de Columpnis" occurs in the Epilogue. With this

<sup>15</sup> £5, 6s. 8d. a year in the gild of Stratford-on-Avon in 1547 (*English Gilds*, p. 223); £6 at Ipswich in the reign of Henry VII (Gross, *Gild Merchant*, II, 127). The London goldsmiths in 1354 paid a chaplain £4, but they may not have had all his services (Unwin's *Gilds of London*, p. 203). Sometimes the chaplain served also as clerk (Gross, II, 239). At Coventry a chaplain had to visit sick members and say a daily mass before sunrise (*Eng. Gilds*, p. 234).

<sup>16</sup> On absenteeism among the secular clergy cf. *Engl. Works of Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted* (ed. Matthew, E. E. T. S.), p. 156; Gower, *Mirour de l'Omme*, 20221, and *Vox Clamantis*, III, cap. xvii.; and of course *Piers Plowman*, A-text, Prol. 80-3.